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Between affects and intertextuality: a rereading of Mary Rooney's Normal People (2018)

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Abstract: This article postulates that affect, despite the denial of critics arguing that postmodern literary works are characterized by a lack of emotional charge, is at the core of an aesthetic substrata and provides narratological devices that deeply impact characters and imagery. Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2018) will act as the exploring ground to confirm our hypotheses. To confirm it, the analysis of *Normal People* shall, at first, reflect a narrative that triggers affect through a substratum fuelled with aesthetic empathy capable of arousing criticism for the implied reader and author, generating narrative tension, and raising characters' awareness of both emotional transference and contagion and duality. Secondly, affect must prove to be a source of psychological representations of characters through the shadow archetype imprinted of masochism and narcissism. Finally, in a postmodern perspective, the aesthetic analysis will reveal a narrative embedded with narratological devices ranging from intertextuality, suspense, satire, etc., to metaphors of containment, void and health capable of rendering affect images.

Key words: emotional transference – empathy – intertextuality – duality – anxiety

Résumé : Cet article postule que l'affect, malgré la critique sur l'absence de charge émotionnelle dans les œuvres littéraires postmodernes, est au cœur de l'esthétique et fournit des outils narratologiques qui impactent profondément les personnages et l'imagerie. *Normal people* (2018) de Sally Rooney nous sert de terrain d'exploration pour confirmer nos hypothèses. Comme résultats, l'analyse de *Normal people* devra donc, dans un premier temps, explorer le récit qui, à travers la théorie de l'affect, reflètera l'empathie esthétique capable de susciter la critique chez le lecteur et l'auteur implicites, de générer des tensions narratives, et de rendre les personnages conscients du transfert et de la contagion émotionnelle et

de la dualité. Deuxièmement, l'affect doit être une source de représentations psychologiques des personnages véhiculant l'archétype de l'ombre empreint de masochisme et de narcissisme. Enfin, dans une perspective postmoderne, l'analyse esthétique révélera une narration intégrant des dispositifs narratifs alliant, d'une part, l'intertextualité, le suspense, la satire, etc. et, d'autre part, des métaphores du confinement, du vide et de la santé capable de restituer l'imagerie de l'affect.

Mots clés : transfert émotionnel – empathie – intertextualité – dualité – anxiété

Introduction

Literature has always conveyed affects either through the aesthetic process or through the reading practice. Thus, after a certain neglect, affect bears a new interest in fields like psychoanalysis, cognitive science, gender studies, political analysis etc., to better cope with modern issues. This heterogeneous and secular interest is confirmed on the preface to *Writing Emotions Theoretical Concepts and Selected Case Studies in Literature* (2017):

This considerable involvement of such a great variety of disciplines led to the assumption of an “emotional turn” (Anz 2006). But one could also pose the challenging question of whether it is appropriate to speak rather of an “affective (re)turn” (Keen 2011), given the fact that emotions have been a topic in philosophy and the arts since antiquity. Emotions were, for example, also broadly treated in the discourses on affect and passion in the 16th and 17th century, in the 18th century's aesthetic of sentiment or, with the concept of empathy (Einfühlung), in the 19th and early 20th century. (JANDL, and Al., 2017)

This witnesses the importance of the theme of affect and justifies the relevance of its rediscovery since it has survived through disciplines and ages. However, the question of how affects work in the literary creation and consumption remains pivotal and can find a guideline in Patrick C. Hogan's *Affect Theory* (2016) who gives key locations of emotion in literature:

These begin with the real people involved—authors and readers. But they extend to implied authors and implied readers as well as wholly fictional persons, such as narrators and characters. Emotion bears also on scenes and sequences—both the sequence of events as they actually occur in the story

and the sequence of events as they are presented in the plot.
(HOGAN, 2016)

Thus, it becomes clear that the analysis of affect in the narrative cannot elude these: references and experience between author and reader, implied intertexts or hypertexts, narrating devices and characterization and sequence of events implying non-linearity.

To reach it despite the denial of critics arguing that postmodern literary works are characterized by a lack of emotional charge, Sally Rooney's *Normal People*¹ (2018) will act as the exploring ground. In fact, the *bildungsroman* depicting the life of adolescent characters subjected to repressed emotions in a patriarchal and capitalist society. Consequently, they are involved in a turmoil that triggers psychological and behavioural reactions.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to dive into both the trigger and result of writing and reading affect to highlight the emotional traces and role in *NP*. The hypotheses that this article posits are: firstly, there is a constancy of literature as a receptacle and source of emotions; secondly, the aesthetics and characterization are impacted by affect; and finally, affect is a vector of narratological and imagery creation. Thus, an analytical approach will be adopted to unveil writing techniques worth of a Rooneyan masterpiece.

This work is therefore divided into three parts. The first one performs an analysis of affect as being at the core of the novel's substrata representing a source of artistic and literary criticism and characterization. The second one delves into the shadow archetype to represent a psychological diagnosis of characters through masochism and narcissism. Thirdly, it will be the place to explore aesthetic representations of affect in the narrative.

¹ The following occurrences of the novel *Normal People* will be with the acronym *NP*.

1. **Normal People as an Affect-Oriented Narrative**

With a highly descriptive narrative about characters' emotions and drama, Sally Rooney's *NP* revealed to be a perfect ground for analysing affect theory through crossed disciplinary boundaries related to psychology, psychoanalysis, medicine, interpersonal communication, literary theory, gender studies, etc.

1.1. **Affect as a Fictional Substratum**

In the representation of literature as an aesthetic site for minor and major feelings and passions, affect theory proposes an artistic and literary criticism. Like navigating through a hypertext, the narrative alternates between the lives of characters, Connell's manuscript and intertexts. Connell is engaged in writing stories to describe his emotions and consequently develops affects that a writer feels for his work in both the writing process and through interpersonal relations.

Rooney raises a key issue about aesthetic empathy on page 56. With literature being able to raise emotions, she uses *Emma* which provoked in Connell a "state of strange emotional agitation" qualified by his professor as "the pleasure of being touched by great art". However, the narrator criticises it: "It feels intellectually unserious to concern himself with fictional people marrying one another. But there it is.". Ironically, he/she recognises the effect on Connell who found in literature a solution to his interpersonal relations: "the same imagination he uses as a reader is necessary to understand real people.". Works of art or literature reflect characters' psychological states. With the vision of an actress' picture on the cover page of *Now a Major Motion Picture* (2018), a novel Elaine is reading, Connell ends up projecting his own drama on it. "Connell feels an almost friendly affinity with her pale period drama face." (120).

Rooney engages in writing criticism and fosters the seriousness in writing. She talks about the "publication ordeal" embodied by Connell who is in a psychological "turmoil" (184) due to mistakes in his printed work. Also, she indulges in criticism about the retelling

of books by authors through reading activities organized to promote literary works. With the author's choice of the place, the quality of his performance and the attempt at orienting his reading towards a specific audience, Connell deduces that reading empathy is perceived through the reader's speech and movements which are pivotal to the appreciation of the book.

Connell's representation of Marianne's emotion is exploited through aesthetic tools that help writers describe narrative tension. Rooney linguistically links emotions with syntax. "*He writes these things down, long run-on sentences with too many dependent clauses, sometimes connected with breathless semicolons, as if he wants to recreate a precise copy of Marianne in print, as if he can preserve her completely for future review.*" (26). The same way punctuation pitches literary texts with emotions, Rooney analogically depicts the couple's relationship with implications of internalization, dependency, continuity and interruptions.

Besides all these aspects, what to say about the writing technique consisting in convoking the reader's experience? On page 65, the author, referring to the mirror effect on Connell, deliberately addresses to the reader with the pronoun "you" to reinforce its capacity of evoking strong feelings and, by the means of association, arouse affect.

1.2. Characterization and affect

In a psychoanalytic study of characters in relation with affect, three approaches remain pivotal. They focus on emotional transference, emotional contagion and duality. These terms will serve as tools for our analytical perspective to gauge the theory of affect in characterization. First, tackling transference or emotional transference in psychology requires an incursion into the following definition to avoid disambiguation:

Transference is a psychology term used to describe a phenomenon in which an individual redirects emotions and feelings, often unconsciously, from one person to another. This process may occur in therapy, when a person receiving

treatment applies feelings toward or expectations of—another person onto the therapist and then begins to interact with the therapist as if the therapist were the other individual. (Goodtherapy, 2019).

Thus, it does not refer to the projection of emotions of an individual A on someone else B, but the feeling of an individual A for a person B projected on someone else C. This type of transfer is perceptible between Connell and his grandmother: *“It probably is, because everything he does is painful to her, because she hates him for being alive. [...] He knows, however, that his grandmother’s point is unrelated to his physical appearance and is meant as a remark on his paternity.”* (40). Connell understands the transfer of his grandmother’s hatred for his father towards him. She sees in him the man who abandoned her pregnant daughter.

In another relation, Connell admitted having *“projected some anxiety”* (74) onto Marianne concerning what people could say about their relationship. As in Freudian theory about the affective transfer that the patient tries to build with the psychotherapeutic analyst, Connell seeks affective counter-transference as he perfectly succeeded with Marianne. However, he faces obstacles with Yvonne, the person assigned by the college counselling service who used *“hygienic vocabulary, words wiped clean as whiteboards, free of connotation, sexless.”* (181). Yvonne displays professional emotional distancing with a certain neutrality on her face.

Since empathy is the capacity of acknowledging and understanding the feelings of others, characters like Connell and Marianne, shared between shame, anxiety and pain, indulge in mimetic attitudes and identifications as on page 125. Here, Marianne and Connell have different approaches in apprehending their relationship. Sally Rooney introduces it through the notion of instinct and affectivity. Marianne’s analysis of their relationship is more focused on the psychological and intellectual interest towards Connell’s mental state, meaning a cognitive empathy. Further, as an implied reference to emotional contagion, the author tackles emotional sharing through Connell’s feelings towards Marianne.

The particularised gendered role of women through caregiving is also suggested.

Secondly, affect is represented through emotional contagion which is defined as follows: “*Emotional contagion is a form of social contagion involving the spontaneous spread of emotions and related behaviors. Such emotional convergence can happen from one person to another, or in a larger group. Emotions can be shared across individuals in many different ways both implicitly or explicitly.*” (Wikipedia, 2021). With the representation of emotions through a psychological perspective, Connell and Marianne's mutual understanding reach such a synchrony that each of them could decipher any facial expressions or body language to let the other read his/her feeling. This private language is perceptible on page 125 in which both characters are able to read each other's facial expressions and developed it as a mode of communication.

In a third approach, reading *NP* requires the conveying of the principle of duality intricately linked to emotions, sexual and ego drives. Connell and Marianne's adolescent feelings which are prompt to instinctual and fetishist energies face counterforces, blockage and redirection due to social norms and apprehensions. Rooney shows the reader that living in a society requires the aptitude in managing alternatively the image people want of oneself, the *ideal self*, and the one you privately live, the *real self*. The difference between Marianne and Connell is that the latter “*has something she lacks, an inner life that does not include the other person.*” (192). He is able to “*keep both worlds, both versions of his life, and to move in between them just like moving through a door.*” (61). He developed “*a little subterfuge*” allowing him to “*live two entirely separate existences.*”. She could not take refuge in fantasy escaping social pressure. She could change her interpersonal relations, but not her personality.

With the theme of normality, the novel tackles developmental model. “*Connell wished he knew how other people conducted their private lives, so that he could copy from example.*” (42). This can be explained by the absence of the father figure, the role model.

Having never known him, Connell develops a lack of interest for his father contrarily to his friends who are “obsessed with their own fathers, obsessed with emulating them or being different from them in specific ways. When they fight with their fathers, the fights always seem to mean one thing on the surface but conceal another secret meaning beneath.” (40). In referring to obsession, depression and a “secret meaning beneath” for their fathers, Rooney renders the Oedipal complex.

Connell becomes aware of his *divided self* after he had sex with Marianne. Through soliloquy, he discovered his unconscious *Self*, his *Id*, invested with human perverse and secret pulsion and “understood why people did insane things for sexual reasons” (25) and ultimately “the adult world that had previously seemed mysterious” (25). The *Id* ironically told him “you will” (24) knowing perfectly he would see Marianne again. In the analysis of Connell’s relations with Marianne, Helen and his mother, a tryptic representation of the *Self* could be drawn. Helen embodies the *Ego*; all his narcissistic behaviours are suppressed and he is not estranged from his milieu; Helen “plants him firmly in the social world” (121). As for Marianne, she represents his *Id* and reveals his instinctive and sexual drives. His mother has always represented the *Superego*, teaching him a Marxist vision of society and repressing in him his propensities.

2. The Shadow Archetype: Between Masochism and Narcissism

Living in society involves private and public personalities. Psychology and literature produced various works about the hidden parts that justify human behaviours. To dive into characters’ psychology, this part will explore an old archetype, that of the shadow, representing the darkest and most complex part of human mind through masochism and narcissism.

2.1. Masochism as a Reaction to Social Anxiety

Masochism is a pivotal element in the psychological analysis of characters. Therefore, to better understand this term, the reading

of the following quotation may enlighten our vision:

Masochism is an attempt to elude anxiety and to gain self-esteem through a "flight forward" to meet pain and punishment necessary to the ultimate attainment of pleasure. Pain itself is not sought; it is merely an obstacle to prospective pleasure. Phantasy is the source of masochism; it is supported by suspense which postpones or destroys the end pleasure as the masochist becomes more ascetic. A third feature is the demonstrative component or provocative exhibitionism. The intermediate and end phases of masochism are sadistic in nature with aggression turned towards the ego and the execution of punishment ceded to another person. Social and sexual masochism are different expressions of the aggressive and erotic urges of sadism; they have become masochistic through direction of the ego toward a passive subject. Sexual masochism brings about sex gratification through pain and punishment; social masochism rehabilitates the ego by resolving social anxiety through punishment. The essence and aim of masochism is "victory through defeat". (REIK, 1941)

Characters analysis in *NP* should follow perspectives that tackle *Self* dimensions but also social and sexual interactions that may help us guide our re-reading of the entanglement and characters' reactions to feelings such as anxiety, pain, etc. Thus, Marianne embodies the figure of the masochist. Her masochism can be analysed through social, moral and sexual orientations. At first, social masochism that Marianne experiences can be diagnosed through two levels. It is provoked, on the one hand, by her family and, on the other hand, by society.

On the familial side, Marianne's masochism can be examined from her difficult familial conditions. Through the process of victimization, Robert J. Stoller's definition of masochism in *Perversion: The erotic form of hatred* (1975) can partly illustrate her behaviour: "Masochism is a residue of unresolved infantile conflict and is neither essentially feminine nor a valuable component of mature female function and character." (STOLLER, 1975). From the angle of an "unresolved infantile conflict", her masochism can be traced back to early maternal humiliation. With her early experience seeing herself and her mother being beaten by her father, she came to

believe that she was the source of her family conflict, the “*primary instigator*” (148).

Secondly, in developing abnormality, a tendency consisting in not following social norms, she becomes socially excluded. She is victim of perpetual male aggressions. All these are not without consequence on her psychology. Consequently, Marianne develops moral masochism due to social pressures and physical or moral aggressions. Thus, her masochism reflects the awareness and conflict of the *Self* in which she questions her existence and relation to the social environment and develops reactions such as submission, alienation, etc.

Marianne feels anxious due to her social exclusion. Like seized by moral guilt, she thinks she deserves being beaten as she remarks to Connell: “*Who wouldn't want to beat me up?*” (106). The reader discovers progressively that Marianne’s state is evolving into a self-hate which is diagnosed when the narrator describes her “*self-hating smile*” (106). This induces for masochists a desire for punishment as she said: “*Maybe I want to be treated badly, she says. I don't know. Sometimes I think I deserve bad things because I'm a bad person.*” (105). Similarly, in an impulse of self-flagellation and as if they were magnetised by drama, masochists call upon themselves events that come like punishment. “*It's time you'll I don't know, she said. In a way I like the idea of something so dramatic happening to me.*” (82). Marianne thinks that she is a bad person and deserves bad things. To submit to social power, it had to go through pain, punishment and also denegation of the *self* hence, her passivity and detachment as described on page 54.

Thirdly, Marianne is unable to explain why she allowed herself into sexual masochism when Connell asked her. This reflects the ambiguity in the scientific tentative of representation of woman complex psychology and hypotheses about her predisposition to masochism. However, in comparing her relations with Jamie and Connell, she highlights the differences:

With Jamie it's like I'm acting a part, I just pretend to feel that

way, like I'm in his power. But with you that really was the dynamic, I actually had those feelings, I would have done anything you wanted me to. Now, you see, you think I'm a bad girlfriend. I'm being disloyal. Who wouldn't want to beat me up? (106).

Through her masochistic desires, the reader makes out two contexts. In the first, she pretends to have pleasure just to give her sexual partner the sensation of domination, meaning sexual arousal, and in the second she is willing to submit to her partner for sexual satisfaction. About the hypothesis that masochists are guided by pleasure, Marianne gives her motivation:

It's not that I get off on being degraded as such, she says. I just like to know that I would degrade myself for someone if they wanted me to. Does that make sense? I don't know if it does, I've been thinking about it. It's about the dynamic, more than what actually happens. Anyway I suggested it to him, that I could try being more submissive. (105)

She avows that it is not for the sake of deriving pleasure from pain but, rather, a way of admitting social power. Marianne gained another masochist characteristic which is the inability to say no. She accepts all treatments from narcissistic characters, showing self-denial for the gratification through pain and degradation and gains what Reik (1941) calls "*victory through defeat*". However, in breaking with Jamie, Marianne admitted her psychological limits in her sexual masochism. In comparing her body to "*a carcass*" (90), the narrator shows Marianne faces inner voidance and detachment from her physical self.

2.2. A Narcissistic Analysis of Characters

In a psychological analysis of narcissism, adolescence is described as characterized by violence and shame. Narcissistic attitudes are often centred on physical appearance, behaviour and intelligence, particularly when puberty changes are impacted by an emotional turmoil.

Connell is presented as a narcissistic character. His relationship with Marianne is guided by his desire to maintain domination over her:

"His effortless tyranny over someone who seems, to other people, so invulnerable. He has never been able to reconcile himself to the idea of losing this hold over her, like a key to an empty property, left available for future use. In fact he has cultivated it, and he knows he has (185)". The narrator informs that it is a process through which Connell has deliberately achieved his aim of dominating a socially excluded and vulnerable woman. The objectual relationship is rendered on page 176: "*Her body is just an item of property, and though it has been handed around and misused in various ways, it has somehow always belonged to him.*". He had an unparalleled power over her.

Connell is portrayed as a sadistic narcissist radiating with "*good health and charisma*" (115). His suicidal desires, after Rob's suicide, reflect narcissistic urges. He expresses aggressive and suicidal desires mostly in the form of fantasies. To get rid of his pain, Connell wanted to "*set himself on fire or drive his car into a tree.*" (101). Developing a certain hatred against Marianne's boyfriend, he nurtures "*compulsive fantasies about kicking Jamie in the head until his skull was the texture of wet newspaper.*" (126). His sadistic fantasies are oriented towards rivals that could take from him his objectified partner. However, through a sexual approach, Connell is not sadistic and "*is simply too nice of a guy to hit a woman*". Contrarily to other narcissistic characters, he knows how to manage without violence Marianne's personality, leaving her "*open, weak, powerless*" (192).

After he was referred to the college counselling service, he admitted that he manifested death drive but just in fantasy. Connell underwent depression graded through a questionnaire that he was asked to fill in at the service. The *Beck Depression Inventory's* questionnaire filling informs the reader about the mental state of Connell. He circled the last level of hopelessness and admitted having "*fantasised about lying completely still until he died of dehydration.*" (152). On pages 154-55, the narrator gives further details about the deterioration of his mental state with a severe anxiety. He experienced tingling hands, "*hyperventilation,*

chest pain, pins and needles all over his body”, “feeling of dissociation”, the disintegration of “the whole cognitive framework by which he made sense of the world”. This was due to the anxiety and terror he felt about the role of shame in the decline of adulation for the narcissist.

Since Rooney states that being normal requires “to conceal the parts of himself that he found shameful and confusing” (159), shame plays an important role in the analysis of the narcissist. Connells felt a “debilitating shame” (60) when Marianne left school. He was ashamed of the domination and for taking profit of Marianne’s vulnerability. He even acknowledges his guilt for what she has become: “But he always thought she was damaged, he thought it anyway. He screws his eyes shut with guilt.” (140). Also, when “saying weird stuff during sex” (130) shame overcame him. Thus, with the sudden disintegration of his sense of external or internal reality, all signs of *Narcissistic mortification* (FREUD, 1964) are present.

Narcissistic people develop violence towards others but also towards themselves with the most common effect which is scarification. Therefore, Rooney chose to tackle the most serious issue in adolescence’s psychological conflict which is death drive and “death by embarrassment” (LIBBEY, 2006). One reason for Connell’s giving up of the suicide attempt was his domination over Marianne: “He has sincerely wanted to die, but he has never sincerely wanted Marianne to forget about him. That’s the only part of himself he wants to protect, the part that exists inside her.” (185). He gained control over her and intended to maintain it.

In *NP*, Rob also displays narcissistic behaviours in trying to be socially admired: “Nothing had meant more to Rob than the approval of others; to be thought well of, to be a person of status. He would have betrayed any confidence, any kindness, for the promise of social acceptance.” (159). Like Connell, his attitude is guided by his desire to gain normality. He was ready to show photographs of Lisa’s naked body to increase his comrades’ perception of him and gain ascendance. Marianne diagnosed in

him “a very insecure person, obsessed with popularity, and his desperation had made him cruel.” (169). Rob took the ultimate decision and committed suicide. Marianne identifies the failure of his quest for social recognition as the main motive. His cruelty as the “perpetrator” (169) induced an invisible effect on him.

Jamie can be considered as a sadistic-narcissist character. His traits are summarized as follows: “And yet he is the most effortlessly confident person Connell has ever met. Nothing fazes him. He doesn't seem capable of internal conflict. Connell can imagine him choking Marianne with his bare hands and feeling completely relaxed about it, which according to her he in fact does.” (126). He is self-confident, self-centred, has no empathy in inflicting pain to others and “took joy in putting others down.” (147). Peggy found in him a “fascist” (110) revealing his authoritarian behaviour. To protect his own image, he does not hesitate to brag in front of his friends to hide his coming failure. He “didn't sit the exams because he knew he wouldn't pass them if he did” (109). Moreover, Marianne considered him as “transparent” (109), incapable of hiding his real Self. In revealing him that she was “a submissive” (109) and proposing him to beat her when having sex, Marianne awakened in Jamie his sadistic pulsion. He “started to tie her up and beat her with various objects” (109) and, progressively, began practices like choking.

Through the narrator's depictions of Lukas, the reader analyses certain traits as belonging to narcissism. Marianne complains about his lack of interest for her and his indulging in criticizing everything as he is “sensitive to the most minuscule of aesthetic failures, in painting, in cinema, even in novels or television shows” (144). Further, she remarks that “this quality of discernment, she has realised, does not make Lukas a good person.” (144). He has different sexual leanings through which they both had an arrangement they called a “game” (144). In fact, the game consisted, in addition to sex, in engaging degrading talks that she had to hear and which gave her “a depression so deep it is tranquillising” (144) it could give her a certain consciousness of her

existence. He could have total authority over her body and ask her to eat whatever he wanted. Also, during photographic shots, he used to tie her like in bondage.

3. Of Affective Narratological Perspectives

Two aesthetic devices characterise affect narrative. They refer, on the one hand, to characters and narrator's consciousness of narrative issues and, on the other hand, to the influence of literature and particularly layers of implied literary texts.

3.1. Narratological devices

Through a postmodern perspective in a bildungsroman marked by a background of a social drama, Sally Rooney brings a certain sensitiveness to her diegesis. This writing involves a narratological ingenuity capable of rendering such emotions to bring a touch of her own.

Rooney creates a narrator and characters that analyse aesthetics and give their critical opinions. She allows the extradiegetic narrator to analyse the narrative and asks questions about Connell's power over Marianne: "*What is the missing element, the excluded part of the story that explains what upset them both?*" (185). With a non-omniscient third person narrator, the *missing element* remains unanswered. Some characters, Connell for example, bear aesthetic judgments and use them in their daily life. Other characters like Lukas are endowed with critical intellect that allows them to detect aesthetic failures but don't develop "*any real sense of right and wrong*" (144) to use it socially leading Marianne to qualify art as "*pointless*" (144).

One of the most common writing techniques discernible about affect study in *NP* is intertextuality. Rooney's narrative navigates between several novels like *Emma*, *Swann's Way* and others. It is used by the author to convey a key issue in emotional criticism which is reading affect. Thus, the author allows characters to indulge in emotional or psychological transfers with Jane Austen's novel *Emma* (1815) on page 56:

One night the library started closing just as he reached the passage in Emma when it seems like Mr Knightley is going to marry Harriet, and he had to close the book and walk home in a state of strange emotional agitation. He's amused at himself, getting wrapped up in the drama of novels like that. It feels intellectually unserious to concern himself with fictional people marrying one another. But there it is: literature moves him. One of his professors calls it 'the pleasure of being touched by great art'. In those words it almost sounds sexual. And in a way, the feeling provoked in Connell when Mr Knightley kisses Emma's hand is not completely asexual, though its relation to sexuality is indirect. It suggests to Connell that the same imagination he uses as a reader is necessary to understand real people also, and to be intimate with them.

Rooney sometimes introduces the reader to themes about affects of literature on true readers. The narrator portrays Connell submerged by emotions that are subjected to criticism qualifying the young man's emotion as "*intellectually unserious*". However, Connell deduces that his experience as reader is essential in his interpersonal relations to apprehend real life. The choice of Rooney to include the reading of Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* is worthy of a palimpsestic masterpiece. As in the first volume of the Proustian novel, *In search of Lost Time* (1922) there are similarities with the recollection of childhood, the will to keep experience in writings, the third person narrator, and, particularly, the explorations of the feelings and thoughts. Thus, comparisons of characters from both novels are inevitable.

Allusions to seminal works suggest to the alert reader identification or similitudes between characters in *NP* and those in other books. The introduction of *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is palimpsestic and lets the reader know that Connell, like Doris Lessing's heroine, experiences three lives shared between the intimate, the social and the geopolitical spaces and decides to put it down in his writings. In fact, to announce Connell's fragmented *self*, the narrator just mentions that the character has read *The Golden Notebook*. Thus, the reader confirms that he navigates between the *ideal self* and the *real self*. Also, the author creates a coincidence between the

sad ending of the pregnant heroine of the movie *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* and Marianne's crying after watching it. Thus, like cinema, the reader easily associates it with a mechanism of affective transfer implying a certain suspense and subjectivity from Marianne.

With an ironical title such as *NP*, the recurring device of satire cannot escape our analysis. Sally Rooney satirises a patriarchal society and highlights the social pyramid that nobody wants to recognize overtly. Marianne develops a rejection of hierarchy by considering herself as being outside the system. Moreover, she describes it as a mechanics that is useless in terms of "rewards". Her affective gendered vision of patriarchy is aesthetically important as on page 77: "*Generally I find men are a lot more concerned with limiting the freedoms of women than exercising personal freedom for themselves, says Marianne.*". Rooney painted it ironically by underlining that men draw no pleasure in controlling a patriarchal system.

3.2. Affect Imageries

Feelings will always bear metaphorical representation which may either depict emotional or psychological states. Thus, trauma, anxiety and other issues about modern life constitute sources of imagery that literature is able to render through images or tropes. In *NP*, metaphors of containment represent social conditions of the individual whose emotions and physical states are confined within a social mould. The first suggestive image that the reader is confronted with and will try to link with the narrative is that of the cover page representing a man and a woman lying in a yin and yang-like position inside a tin can. The reader is able to draw the image of the *Self* imprisoned in a community that reduces their feelings and the dualism that the couple forms. Also, through metaphors of containment Connell assimilates the preservation of his writing experience to the fact of trapping them in a jar. Wanting to conserve his emotions and conscious of the role of literary forms to keep it, Rooney uses the physical container to ensure that "*it can never fully leave him*" (122).

In the description of a patriarchal system as well as trauma, the trope of the prison is persistent. *"It seemed so obviously insane to her then that she should have to dress up in a costume every morning and be herded around a huge building all day, and that she wasn't even allowed to move her eyes where she wanted, even her eye movements fell under the jurisdiction of school rules."* (16). Rooney renders the image of school as being that of a prison, a blockage against the individual's psychological and behavioural freedom which is reinforced by Marianne's *"insane"* conception of it and the herd attitude students follow.

Psychological compartmentalization intervenes in the representation of characters psychology. Marianne is a source of behavioural barrier lifter that made Connell discover his other *Self*, the *Id* which leads him to behave differently. Consequently, Rooney metaphorizes his self as a room gathering his *Id* and ego with Marianne endowed with the power of *"opening a door away from normal life"* (12), a passage through which he can access abnormality. Beset by conflicting values and emotions, abnormal behaviours are let loose in the other room.

On another registry, void or the feeling of voidance as metaphor is important in trauma and psychotherapy. The author exploits it as a trope on page 90 to represent Marianne's feeling of degradation, depression and spiritual death which is convoked by the term *"carcass"*. To depict depression, the author often recurs to chthonic schemes with words like pit, abyss, *"empty space"*, etc. For example, the depression in which Lukas' humiliations put her is rendered as follows: *"The inside of her body seems to be gravitating further and further downwards, towards the floor, towards the centre of the earth."* (149).

Health metaphors cannot lack in such a novel dealing with psychology, trauma, depression, etc. To qualify the neutral attitude of the professional in charge of evaluating Connell's depression, Rooney conveys word associations imprinted by medical analogies. *"Mental healthcare professionals are always using this hygienic vocabulary, words wiped clean as whiteboards, free of connotation,*

sexless." (181). Words like *hygienic*, *wiped clean* show the lack of inference in the patient's psychology so as to diagnose his state.

The writer recurs to substances used in healing or relieving traumatic states to depict the state of submission during their sexual relations. On page 176, Connell's touch is described as having "a narcotic effect" and giving a "pleasurable stupidity". This reminds the state that drug addicts experience. Still about her submissive behaviour, Marianne is compared to "a trained animal" which remains "stock-still" after a tap of its trainer.

The analogy of Marianne's gaze to a mirror reflecting all secrets is telling in the process of empathy. "Her gaze unsettles him like it used to, like looking into a mirror, seeing something that has no secrets from you." (194). As in neuroscience, this reflection raises self-awareness.

In masochism and narcissism, the fetishist representation of human body is pivotal. Marianne, a victim of sadistic narcissists, has her body assimilated to "an item of property" ready for reuse or "handed around" and even "misused" (176). Still on the relations between the narcissist and object, Rooney recurs to antonymic words to depict Connell's emotion. She goes further by giving us a quality of his pain. With his "pleasurable sorrow" (25), Connell knew that Marianne would be alienated from the society and that, like a narcissistic predator, he would have the opportunity to jump over his prey.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to examine through a binary reading the trigger and result of writing and reading affect to highlight the emotional traces and role in the substrata of *NP* and to analyse, besides characters reactions, how the entanglement is influenced. Sally Rooney's narrative could, therefore, be said to have largely confirmed our hypotheses.

Indeed, *NP* reflects a narrative that triggers affect through its writing and reading. It has showed how emotions through affect

theory constitutes the substrata of literary masterpieces, creating aesthetic empathy capable of arousing criticism for the implied reader and author, generating narrative tension, and of influencing characterization by exerting emotional transference, emotional contagion and duality. Also, affect proved to be a source of representation of characters through psychological traits conveying shadow archetype imprinted of masochism and narcissism. Finally, in a postmodern perspective, aesthetic analyses revealed that Scarrow embedded his narrative with narratological devices ranging from intertextuality, suspense, satire, etc., to tropes such as containment, void and health metaphors rendering affective images.

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